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From: Gong, Kristiene
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Subject: Crested Butte Spill Clips 10/9/2015

Washington Times:

<http://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2015/oct/8/epa-comes-under-fire-following-another-colorado-mi/>

EPA comes under fire following another Colorado mine spill

By Valerie Richardson - The Washington Times - Thursday, October 8, 2015

DENVER — The Environmental Protection Agency took flak Thursday for another spill from a clean-up project at a Colorado mine, this time a relatively small discharge at the Standard Mine near Crested Butte.

Josh Green, spokesman for Rep. Scott Tipton, Colorado Republican, said local officials have confirmed that more than 2,000 gallons of reportedly uncontaminated water were spilled from the mine site Wednesday into a local watershed.

Mr. Tipton said the accident, coming on the heels of the Aug. 5 blowout at the Gold King Mine, raises more questions about the agency's competence and commitment to transparency.

He said the EPA has yet to notify his office a day after the accident, which was first reported Thursday by the Crested Butte News.

"While initial reports are that the water was not contaminated, another spill caused by the actions of the EPA calls further into question this agency's ability to adequately execute these types of projects," Mr. Tipton said in a statement.

The agency is under investigation by the Interior Department after uncorking more than 3 million gallons of orange wastewater from the inactive Gold King Mine near Silverton, Colorado, which contaminated water supplies in Colorado and New Mexico along the Animas and San Juan rivers.

Agency officials were criticized for failing to notify local authorities for 24 hours after the accident. EPA Administrator Gina McCarthy apologized afterward for the accident and has assured the affected communities that the agency will clean up the mess and compensate locals for their losses.

“It is troubling and frustrating that the spill occurred yesterday and once again the EPA did not notify our office,” Mr. Tipton said.

The EPA press office did not return immediately a message left Thursday requesting comment.

In a statement, the town of Crested Butte said an EPA contractor had been working on the mine when “a vacuum truck siphoning clear water from the surface of the pond accidentally dipped into gray-colored sediment ,” which led to the “accidental discharge of sediment and gray-colored water into Elk Creek.

The discharge contained PH-neutral rock slurry and water from the mine, but the town Department of Public Works “has determined that any impact to the town’s drinking water would be negligible,” based on “the size and content of the spilled material as understood from the EPA.”

The EPA also reported the spill to officials in Gunnison County, the Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment, and the Coal Creek Watershed Alliance.

The Crested Butte News said Thursday on Facebook that “approximately 2,400 gallons of water spilled from a containment pond into the watershed Wednesday.”

“There is no threat to human health as a result of the spill,” the newspaper said.

Even so, the report drew several skeptical comments from readers. “Relax everybody! The EPA says everything is hunky dory!” Donna Davenport said.

Denver Post:

http://www.denverpost.com/news/ci_28940776/epa-crew-at-standard-mine-above-crested-butte

EPA crew at Standard Mine above Crested Butte triggers waste spill

Republican critics pounce on agency but locals still praise EPA willingness to step up and tackle toxic mines

By Bruce Finley POSTED: 10/08/2015 12:44:50 PM MDT20 COMMENTS| UPDATED:
ABOUT 8 HOURS AGO

Draining old mines foul Denver's watershed every day with contaminants

An Environmental Protection Agency crew working at the Standard Mine above Crested Butte triggered a wastewater spill into a creek that flows into the town water supply — a small-scale repeat of the Gold King incident this year.

Only an estimated 2,000 gallons spilled Tuesday, amid efforts to open a collapsed portal. The impact on town water is expected to be minimal.

Critics pounced.

U.S. Rep. Scott Tipton said the spill — while not a disaster like the EPA-triggered 3 million-gallon Gold King deluge that turned the Animas River mustard-yellow — raises questions about EPA procedures.

"They told us things were going to be different. Now we have a spill. ... We've apparently got a real challenge with the EPA, not only with notification but their accountability and their ability to adequately execute these types of cleanup projects," Tipton said. "They've got resources. They're the ones in charge of the program. And they've had two spills in my district alone. Is there a better way to approach this?"

The Standard Mine, five miles west of Crested Butte and abandoned, has been designated an environmental disaster since 2005 and targeted for a superfund cleanup. It is one of an estimated 230 inactive mines in Colorado that state officials know to be leaking toxic heavy metals into headwaters of the nation's rivers.

EPA work at the Standard Mine was halted after the Aug. 5 Gold King blowout above Silverton — pending an EPA review of procedures at old mines. The Standard Mine work resumed Sept. 5.

Tuesday spill

The spill happened at 1:30 p.m. Tuesday, and the EPA said it immediately informed public works officials. Residents weren't notified. Crested Butte Mayor Aaron Huckstep said he wasn't notified until Thursday.

EPA officials on Wednesday, responding to Denver Post queries about the mine, didn't reveal the spill. On Thursday afternoon, the agency issued a prepared statement saying that, based on neutral acidity and creek flow levels, Crested Butte didn't close its water intakes.

"Subsequent investigation found no visible plume or signs of significant impacts in downstream locations," the EPA said.

At the cleanup site, acidic wastewater laced with cancer-causing cadmium and other toxic heavy metals leaches out of the mine into Elk Creek, which flows into Coal Creek — a primary source of water for Crested Butte. The Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment has determined that the levels of arsenic, cadmium and zinc in Coal Creek exceed state standards.

Huckstep requested EPA help testing water in Elk Creek, Coal Creek and in town.

"I want to make sure that the EPA's work is being done in a diligent manner and that their contractors are following the right procedures. We'd like to see these types of events not happen," Huckstep said.

"Obviously, after Gold King, there's a high level of public concern and attention — rightfully so. ... The EPA is willing to come in and do the work. We support that. But we want to make sure that these types of circumstances don't happen."

The local Coal Creek Watershed Coalition began additional water sampling along the waterways "to determine what the impact of the spill was," director Zach Vaughter said.

"While this event is unfortunate, we have a great cooperation and partnership with the EPA working on our watershed. ... From what I understand, they've kept town staff and the coalition in the loop."

The EPA has been working toward installation of a long-planned bulkhead plug inside the mine, an effort to reduce the flow of acidic wastewater leaching cadmium, arsenic, lead and manganese from tailings and tunnels.

How it happened

EPA crew members were drilling a new opening at the mine, parallel to a portal that is partially

collapsed. They were using a vacuum truck to siphon water from a waste pond, but the truck "dipped too low," the EPA's statement said, causing grey-colored water from inside the mine and sediment to spill into Elk Creek.

Colorado Attorney General Cynthia Coffman, who threatened legal action after the Gold King disaster, said she'll do all she can to protect state resources and hold the EPA responsible.

"Once again the Environmental Protection Agency has apparently endangered Colorado's waterways while drilling at an abandoned mine," Coffman said. "I continue to be concerned that the EPA wants to zealously regulate Colorado's resources but refuses to be accountable for their own activities when they negatively impact our state."

Durango Herald:

<http://www.durangoherald.com/article/20151008/NEWS01/151009674&source=RSS>

Latest EPA mine spill raises new questions

Incident near Crested Butte leads to fresh attacks

By Peter Marcus Herald staff writer Article Last Updated: Thursday, October 08, 2015 10:46pm

DENVER – News Thursday that the Environmental Protection Agency was responsible for another mine spill, this time near Crested Butte, came with a quick political punch.

But the Standard Mine spill, which occurred at a Superfund site, is greatly different than the Aug. 5 Gold King Mine spill, in which 5 million gallons of orange, contaminated water poured into the Animas River in Silverton.

The Standard Mine incident, which occurred Wednesday, was limited to less than 2,000 gallons

of water. Also, the spill near Crested Butte was not the result of excavation work at the mine, as was the case with Gold King. Gold King also never had a Superfund listing, which offers restoration dollars to blighted areas.

What is similar is that an EPA contractor is at the center of the Standard Mine spill, as was the case with Gold King. It was not immediately clear who the contractor was. In the case of Gold King, it was Environmental Restoration LLC, which is the St. Louis-based primary emergency response contractor for the EPA in Colorado.

The EPA was heavily criticized in the wake of Gold King for poor communication by delaying notifications to local governments. But Crested Butte Town Manager Todd Crossett said the EPA immediately notified state and local officials after the latest incident.

The Standard Mine spill included gray-colored sediment from a holding pond at the mine. The contractor was de-watering the pond containing un-mineralized sediment and water from the lower mine adit.

The water and sediment was treated to a pH of 7, which is considered normal. The treated water from the pond was being discharged into Elk Creek. But a vacuum truck pumping water from the pond accidentally dipped into the gray-colored sediment, which led to the discharge into Elk Creek.

The material released into the creek contained a mixture of pH-neutral pulverized rock slurry and water from the mine.

“Based upon the size and content of the spilled material as understood from the EPA, the flow levels downstream and the 10-million-gallon storage reservoir at the town’s treatment plant, the Town Department of Public Works has determined that any impact to the town’s drinking water would be negligible,” Crossett said in a statement.

An EPA statement late Thursday agreed that there were “no signs of significant impacts in downstream locations.”

To be safe, Crested Butte is conducting its own water testing.

For the EPA's critics, the incident offers an opportunity to pile on.

"While initial reports are that the water was not contaminated, another spill caused by the actions of the EPA calls further into question this agency's ability to adequately execute these types of projects," said U.S. Rep. Scott Tipton, R-Cortez. "It is troubling and frustrating that the spill occurred yesterday (Wednesday) and once again the EPA did not notify our office."

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Gunnison Times:

<http://www.gunnisontimes.com/epa-reports-spill-standard-mine>

EPA REPORTS SPILL AT STANDARD MINE

Thu, 10/08/2015 - 3:51pm

Impact to Town of Crested Butte's drinking water appears negligible

The Town of Crested Butte has been notified by the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) of a spill estimated at 2,000 gallons or less of water and gray-colored sediment from a holding pond at the Standard Mine.

According to the EPA, a contractor had been dewatering the pond containing un-mineralized sediment from drilling operations and water from the lower mine adit. The contents had been treated to a neutral PH of 7. The treated water from the sediment pond was being discharged into Elk Creek as part of a planned maintenance activity. A vacuum truck siphoning clear water from

the surface of the pond accidentally dipped into gray-colored sediment leading to the accidental discharge of sediment and gray-colored water into Elk Creek. The discharged material contained a mixture of PH-neutral rock slurry and water from the mine.

Based upon the size and content of the spilled material as understood from the EPA, the flow levels downstream, and the 10 million gallon storage reservoir at the town's treatment plant, the Town Department of Public Works has determined that any impact to the town's drinking water would be negligible. The town has also hired an independent contractor to perform additional testing to ensure that there is no negative impact to the town watershed or drinking water.

Work on the holding pond is now complete.

The town is communicating and working closely with the EPA on this issue. The EPA has additionally contacted the Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment, Gunnison County and the Coal Creek Watershed Alliance. The town is also in contact with these agencies.